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ABSTRACT

The apprehension and insecurity generated by the shattering of expectations of long-term work are causing many individuals to develop self-limiting beliefs and behaviors and resist taking responsibility for their own career futures. Consequently, endeavoring to facilitate a client's career decision making in one meeting has become unprofessional. The first objective should be to determine where clients are in the career review process. Helpers (career counselors) need a structured process to help them and their clients navigate through the nonlinear career-planning journey. Stevens' model of career development, which emphasizes integration of clients' work-related and personal strengths by encouraging a review of the whole person, postulates six stages of career development: self-assessment, interpreting data, opportunity awareness, decision learning, transition training, and transition accomplished. Career planning workbooks and career assessments that can be self-administered under a counselor's supervision are useful tools for career planning because they help clients develop responsibility and accountability for their career development and work satisfaction. Regardless of the tools available to them, many people get stuck in the decision-making phase. Gelatt's Positive Uncertainty Approach is valuable because it helps clients learn to live with uncertainty and not always expect definite answers and precise outcomes in their career planning. (MN)

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Why Career Planning Can't Be Hurried

by Paul Stevens

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Why Career Planning Can't Be Hurried

by Paul Stevens, Founder / Director, The Centre for Worklife Counselling

Most people approach a career helper without an understanding of what is involved in finding the answer to their question: 'Which next career action step is really right for me?'. Whether it is an employee or individual approaching a career advisory service or a course participant undertaking career training, the challenge is to deliver the help sought in a professional, sensitive manner without compromising what the career helper knows is required.

This article covers some of the key issues in the career helper-client support relationship whether within an employment environment, private practice or case manager agency situation. The term 'client' is used to denote employee, member of the general public or student.

Why people say: 'I don't know'

When asked what you would like to do next in career terms, the frequent response is: 'I don't know'. Why is this so, when many have learnt through the realities of today's workplace, recurring restructuring, loss of work colleagues through repeated downsizing or outsourcing that it is sound self-management to know what could be the alternatives to the job role currently being carried out. Knowing what career direction to change to would contribute to feelings of inner security and the ability to traverse unexpected job-related events, even termination of employment.

There are generally many reasons for the response: 'I don't know'. Some people are afraid their decision will have to last forever. They fear such a commitment. Others feel that by electing for one direction, they will overlook something 'better'. Or they may be unsure how to express what they want. Or they may want several career roles at once or be immobilised by the awkwardness of having to make a choice. There are some who fear stating what they want and then not achieving it. A minority are locked into believing that work is only for earning a living and anything reasonable will do.

Workforce members have experienced a decade of nervousness in which involuntary job loss has become commonplace. Expectations of long-term work have been shattered, superseded by the new message from employers that each employee must ensure their employability for the next pay period. It used to be until long service leave or retirement date; now it's a career horizon of one month! It's the era of restructured employer-employee relationships—where the concept of a serial contract between the parties implies a matchmaking process and a relationship as precarious as personal ones can be.

> ***"Career theory has moved away from linear concepts and the presumption of work systems stability to entrepreneurial notions and presumption of continuous change."***
>
> Frederic Hudson Ph.D.
> The Hudson Institute, USA

A career as a concept is now mostly discontinuous, where people are stringing together jobs using different portfolios of strengths, skills, interests and wants—requiring regular reassessment. It's a working world of making new decisions, frequently

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Figure 1 — Reactions to the New Workplace Deal

- ⊗ It makes me angry
- ⊗ It's unfair
- ⊗ It's exploitation
- ⊗ It's demotivating
- ⊗ It's a bad return on investment in my studies
- ⊗ It makes me cynical
- ⊗ It makes me want to escape
- ⊗ It's not what I was led to expect
- ⊗ I don't have a career any more

knowing each will be short-term. Avoiding such decision making will result in working harder, more precariously than the previous generation and enjoying it less.

The reactions to this new workplace deal are varied. (See Figure 1.) Apprehension, insecurity and even fear are the genesis of self-limiting beliefs and behaviours that resist taking responsibility for one's own career future. It's easier to surrender to fate—a frail positioning of self when people are expected to assume responsibility for work design, self-marketing, contracting and redesign throughout their adult years.

Inadequate preparation

Why a client says 'I don't know' could be simply that they are perplexed as to how to find the answer. Our educational institutions provide prolific information about careers and their associated predictions of supply and demand and qualification prerequisites. A person may feel overwhelmed by this amount of information.

Education in how to search one's inner self first, then take this knowledge into the arena of sorting through career information is rarely taught adequately or at all in our country's classrooms or lecture theatres.

A client needs to have an awareness of their core career identity (see Figure 2)—a range of personal factors that help identify an appropriate career action step and which alter as one journeys through life experiencing expected, unexpected and crisis events. Without this self-knowledge, too many have spent endless hours, weeks and even years looking outwardly for the perfect career situation.

By choice or ignorance, they have bypassed the need to look thoroughly at who they really are and want to be. This outward looking has them focusing on self-defeating beliefs and either inadequate or misinformation.

Many people just wait for things to happen in their career situation or seek out other people whom they hope will make their decisions for them.

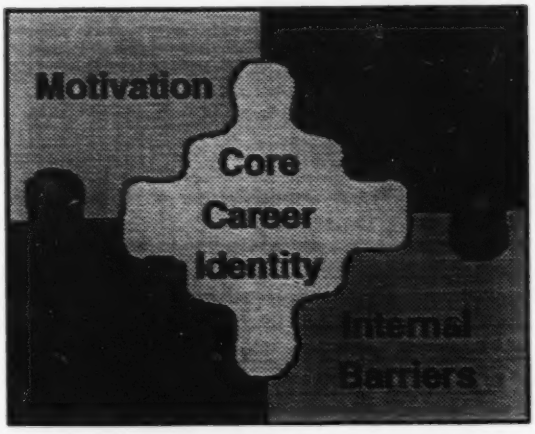
The challenge is to help people re-frame their thinking and embrace the new workplace as an opportunity for personal empowerment.

People who take the time to learn to know themselves through career self-review and planning grow to like themselves, are self-confident and by feeling good, they produce positive results for themselves and those with whom they work.

Multiple agenda

It is not unusual for a career helper to hear a wide range of client issues during the first meeting. A significant number will be unfocused. The client's career path may have been disjointed and decision making for past changes often been irrational. We have to teach our clients personal career

Figure 2 — Core Career Identity



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management before they can undertake it.

Many clients are going through separation from their partner or recovering from such a separation; others are reluctantly single, widowed or married. The whole person is in front of us—not just a client seeking career answers. They often lack self-motivation, stemming from employment experiences which have created a negative attitude, suspicion or mistrust, a feeling of powerlessness in the employer-employee relationship.

We have to teach our clients personal career management before they can undertake it.

A client brings to the career helper much complexity with the question: 'What should I do with my career?'

It takes time

To endeavour to facilitate a client's decision making in one meeting is simply unprofessional. Rather, the approach should be to arrange a series of meetings—'helping encounters' as we call them. The objective of the first is to determine where the client is at in the overall career review process.

The first meeting is rarely completed within an hour. Outgoing, verbally articulate clients tend to elaborate more when discussing their issues than quieter, more reserved and less communicative ones. The latter may need drawing out through careful questioning. As self-reflection is a crucial part of the career planning process, you should secure agreement on what the client will do and think about as 'homework' before the next meeting.

Sometimes, when talking about their past and their present life, a client will become emotional. Past non-productive patterns of career behaviour will surface, a feeling that time has been wasted or a realisation by the person that they have been living someone else's agenda.

A structured process

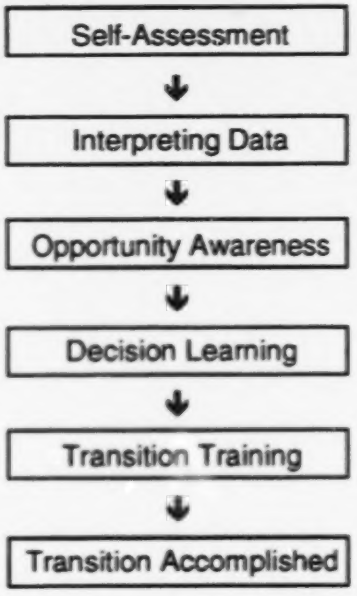
A helper needs a structured process to help both them and their client navigate through the non-linear career planning journey. They also need to know the comprehensive range of resources which assist the client to unravel their dilemma and reconstitute career direction plans.

A helper needs a structured process to help both them and their client navigate through the non-linear career planning journey.

The Stevens' Model for career planning comprises six stages designed in a deliberate sequence (see Figure 3) with specific activities for each stage. The activities are described in detail in ***A Passion for Work: Our Lifelong Affair***, ISBN 1 875134 20 4 or viewed at our web site: www.worklife.com.au. The Model is widely used within Australia and in several other countries.

The Stevens' Model emphasises the integration of both the work-related and personal strengths of the client by encouraging a review of the whole person. The Model provides the client with an organising framework in order to understand self and their world of work environment and then develop a considered set of career options. It has the potential to give each client a sense of wholeness and balance through the integration of results from career assessment instruments, workbook provoked responses, computer-based career guidance software, introspection and reflection and exchanging thoughts and feelings with others.

Figure 3 — Stevens' Model of Career Development



Career planning workbooks

A career planning workbook is a useful tool for the client's journey. Each section is like a bus stop requiring a pause for self-reflection, before commencing the next. By using it, the client is growing in self-responsibility and self-accountability for their career development and work satisfaction.

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Hence, when a client seeks help, it is important that the helper does not jeopardise this development by taking a directive role or authoritarian posture. The helper should take more a role of continuing to facilitate the client's self-determination. To help, but help in a particular way. Facilitative counselling behaviour is the challenge for the career helper when supporting a client through a program towards a mature state of career self-resiliency.

"People who are frightened at their present place of work—scared that they may lose their job—will never find any peace of mind until they have a plan, fully in place, for what they are going to do next."

Richard Nelson Bolles

A career planning workbook design is essentially a developmentally based concept, not a matching process. Clients are not led to a list of occupations on which to base their career decisions. They are led to initiate their own career exploration and apply detective, communication and research skills. This requires self-sufficiency in the user, but does not preclude the need for—in fact, encourages—talking to others during the self-search problem-solving process.

Some people experience difficulty with self-search exercises of this nature. They may want a speedy resolution to their problem, a quick fix. Some will not experiment adequately with the exercises before concluding that they do not need them or that this method is unappealing. Reluctance to commit personal thoughts in writing will deter some. Concerns about sharing personal data with a career helper may cause them to fail to extend their own learning boundaries. Some need to be driven to undertake this effort by a recent setback in their career or personal life.

The important factor is that reading and thinking about career and life management rarely suffices when considering all that needs to be done to make significant changes in behaviour, attitude and inner well-being about worklife. A client who actively works through the exercises in a workbook is learning the value of feeling more in charge of their career direction and enhancing the belief, and thereby their self-confidence, that their diligence will bring the results they deserve for undertaking this effort.

Career assessment instruments

Instruments can be self-administered under your supervision that are reliable, objective and useful. Appropriately selected, they are 'user friendly' in that the client can easily understand the vocabulary and themes involved. Instruments serve as jigsaw puzzle pieces—each contributing vital information about self which, when put together with pieces from other instruments, make up a coherent 'picture' of who the client really is and where they want to move to.

The picture from these instruments is further enhanced by adding data collected in the workbook and during counselling discussions. A road map is then established by the client and options and alternatives can be evaluated on real, not conjectured data. Instruments both confirm data to the client and provide new data, reveal the common threads and patterns—the themes essential to the client's uniqueness which must be incorporated in subsequent career action steps.

Instruments by themselves can't tell us where our careers should go but they do provide the essential supplementary information. To help develop a picture of the whole person, a range of instruments should be used. Recording results promotes reflection. Thoughts begin to crystal-

Figure 4 — Career Assessment Instruments

Instruments:

- Open avenues to explore
- Encourage investigation
- Affirm a process
- Do not give the answer
- Reassure that answers are within the person
- Empower client to find them
- Facilitate follow-up

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lise when they appear on paper. Insightful information tends to emerge when an instrument requires responses to the prompters within their design.

Overall, such self-assessment tools assist the client in looking at past experiences, clarifying what really matters in both work and personal life and providing signposts to the content of their career planning—the specifications for their next career move.

The helper needs to become very familiar with instruments and nuances of their interpretation.

The helper needs to become very familiar with instruments and the nuances of their interpretation. Here again, a non-directive approach is needed. Skilled companionship with the client while they wrestle with the implications of their data—not telling them the job that fits it.

In addition to empathic companionship and provision of a safe setting for the career review, the helper can make their most productive contribution by observing and communicating which particular self-help activity the client should undertake next to gain most benefit.

The positive uncertainty approach

Many people get stuck in the decision-making phase, whether using workbooks or instruments or a combination of both. One of the reasons is that the client may be using a logical-rational approach where everything must add up neatly before they select an option and implement it. The radical changes now occurring in the format of job roles and employment patterns away from traditional occupational definitions provokes a new approach suggested by H.B. Gelatt.

Figure 5 — The Crescendo Model

Stevens' Model	Process	Resilience Growth
Stage 1 Self-Assessment	Exploring	Self-Identity
Stage 2 Interpreting Data	Reflecting	Self-Insight
Stage 3 Opportunity Awareness	Experimenting	Self-Efficacy
Stage 4 Decision Learning	Committing	Self-Confidence
Stage 5 Transition Training	Implementing	Self-Direction
Stage 6 Transition Accomplished	Well-Being	Self-Control
Career Revitalisation	Convergence Congruence	Career Commitment

Gelatt invites clients to learn to live with uncertainty and not always to expect definite answers and precise outcomes in their career planning.

Gelatt's Positive Uncertainty Approach tells us to:

- use the whole brain, accepting uncertainty, asking for flexibility, using creativity and intuition, i.e. a non-sequential, non-systematic and non-scientific process.
- use four personal factors as a framework for your decision: what you want; what you know; what you believe; and what you do when the future isn't what it used to be and we don't know what it will be.

He suggests that decision makers about career directions are characterised by being focused and flexible about what they want, knowing what they want but aren't sure, treating career goals as hypotheses, i.e. goal guided but not goal governed, balancing achieving career goals and discovering them.

Gelatt's approach is a paradoxical balance: the more you know, the more you realise you don't know. The key is to accept this, but not be paralysed by it. Not knowing for certain opens opportunities for new knowledge, new career options, being free to invent your own career future. Gelatt describes this in ***Creative***

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Decision Making Using Positive Uncertainty (Crisp Publications).

The reward

Helping others to help themselves has its special rewards. I'm referring to the gifts our clients give back to us, often without realising it. There is also the fact we are doing our helping professionally. Reflect on your own feelings as you observe a client you are helping grow, take action, become more self-resilient (many times claiming that they did all by themselves!). It is like a flower coming into bloom.

The journey to career self-reliance the client traverses can be described as a crescendo effect—in the early stages they grapple with the myriad of factors which affect their decision making, then break through to enhanced self-understanding to arrive at a point of firm resolution and commitment to thoroughly considered action (see Figure 5). The self-knowledge and information gained from the process guided by the six stages within the Stevens' Model increase the client's self-confidence. This serves as a motivating force for overcoming constraints and implementing resolutions.

Your skill in helping clients to take their journey in less of a hurry will be challenged at each helping encounter.

Carl Rogers wrote in ***On Becoming a Person*** that his work in applying helpful measures for others stretched and developed his own potential for growth—it will be so for you.

WORKLIFE™

— An Explanation

The term 'Worklife' was chosen to reflect our continuing work in research, counselling, training and publishing material which relates to improving people's enjoyment from their employment activities and other aspects of their lives.

We do not accept the traditional view of career support—that is, to help people acquire satisfaction only from their working hours. We consider that occupational satisfaction can only occur when a person's total needs are included in the assessment of what is lacking and what needs to be done to increase inner well-being, improved relationships with others and effective performance both at work and non-work activities. 'Life' in Worklife means our focus is on the total person. 'Work' relates to the roles in which the person is involved (employee, student, homecarer and citizen) and their environments (workplace, educational institution, home, community).

Ours is a holistic approach—in our counselling and career training workshops we consider all features of a person at the same time as maintaining respect for personal privacy by use of non-threatening inquiries into thoughts and circumstances.

WORKLIFE™

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This article is published in the interests of promoting best practice in the provision of support to adults in their career management and life transitions and to enhance their contributions to those who employ them.

Other monographs in this series:

- What Works and What Doesn't in Career Development Programs
- Bottom Up Succession Planning Works Better
- The Worklife Methodology: A Framework for Career Transition Making
- Career Self-Help Centres: An HRM Initiative with Distinct ROI
- Gaining Commitment to Change through Career Coaching
- Strategies for Electronic Career Support to Employees

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